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FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0544
INFO RUEHAD/AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI PRIORITY 0334
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0861
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS PRIORITY 5665
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 0966
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 0112
RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI PRIORITY 0199
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 0281
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 5395

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 000056

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/11/2022
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: U/S BURNS VISIT TO TURKEY JANUARY 18-19

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (S) Your visit comes at the start of a pivotal year for Turkey. Presidential and parliamentary elections will intensify internal political competition and aggravate nationalism at a time when Turkey finds itself more uncertain about its future -- both domestically and externally -- than any time in the past half century. These pressures plus regional challenges in Iraq, Iran, and Lebanon and an Armenian genocide resolution that Congress will soon take up make for a perfect storm that threatens our interests here. Your visit and our sustained engagement in coming months will be key for our ability to manage U.S.-Turkish relations through this and to maintain our partnership on key issues in this volatile region.

Where We Find Ourselves

¶2. (C) Our bilateral relations seem increasingly frayed. Iraq, the PKK, Lebanon and our tough line on Iran have led to widespread anti-American sentiment. Turks will highlight for you their anger about the lack of concrete steps by the U.S. to combat the PKK in northern Iraq, and their belief that the appointment of General Ralston as special envoy was simply a bid to buy time. Even more do knowledgeable Turks show anxiety about broader regional instability, fueled by fears that Iraq will fragment, Lebanon and Palestine will implode, Iran and the West will collide militarily, and Iran will continue to expand its "Shia crescent."

¶3. (S) Internally, politicking has begun ahead of the elections for a new President in May and parliament in November. Infighting among secularists, Islamists and nationalists is increasing. Each regards the U.S. as both a convenient punching bag and a potential source of support. PM Erdogan remains by far Turkey's most popular politician and his ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) will likely lead the government after parliamentary elections. But Erdogan and FM Gul -- in the face of PKK violence, angst about Iraq and Iran, and growing opposition to Turkey in Europe -- are vulnerable to nationalists and the military if they pursue further reforms or collaborate constructively with the U.S. or EU. Their lack of leadership, Turkish pugnacity and a wildly speculative press will keep public debate at full boil and make it challenging for us to find a balanced forum for discussion. Heightened tension between the AK government and the military, including continued rhetorical challenges by Chief of the General Staff General Buyukanit and military opposition to an Erdogan presidency, adds to this explosive mix.

14. (S) 2007 will be our most difficult year with Turkey in decades, and sustained engagement will be essential if we are to manage our interests here adequately. Whatever our problems here -- and Turkey's problems with us -- our countries share the same interests and goals on most of the big issues. We need to keep the focus on that. We also need to be persistent in guiding Turkey in the right direction on regional issues. Listening, consulting and supporting Ankara when possible, including on combating the PKK, resolving the Cyprus dispute and advancing EU membership, provide essential reassurance that we take this country seriously. High-level contacts are vital to this effort. Your visit will be followed closely by visits to Washington in January by Defense Minister Gonul and in February by FM Gul and General Buyukanit. Several groups of parliamentarians will also be traveling to Washington this winter.

15. (S) Secretary Rice and FM Gul agreed to the Shared Vision document in July 2006. It commits us to working together on issues of common concern and provides for several tracks for the structured dialogue, including expert-level talks, policy planning consultations, broad-based dialogue and high-level review. Your visit is the first of several upcoming events. Dan Sullivan will head the U.S. delegation to the first Economic Partnership Council meeting in several years in early February, and policy planning talks will follow a week later.

Key Issues

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16. (S) Iraq and PKK: The government and public here remain unnerved by developments in Iraq. They are especially worried about Iran's apparent domination of major parts of the political spectrum and the potential for disintegration and anarchy in Iraq. Aggravation about an autonomous or independent Kurdistan is sharpened by fear that a Kurdish annexation of Kirkuk will lead to massive communal violence and ultimately to Iraq's dissolution. Turkish leaders will want to hear more about our new strategy for Iraq and have their views solicited. You should urge them to continue constructively to engage the Iraqi government, including in the north; dealing directly with the Iraqi Kurds is always a tough sell, but a must. Turkey is frustrated by what it views as a lack of concrete results from General Ralston's appointment as Special Envoy to counter the PKK. Pressure will quickly mount for Turkey to act unilaterally in northern Iraq this spring, especially as large-scale PKK actions resume following their winter lull and as a self-declared cease-fire likely ends by May or sooner. Erdogan and Gul are already positioning themselves with the public. You should reiterate our commitment to helping combat the PKK. At the same time, you might impress upon the Turks that an overall solution to the Kurdish problem needs to be political and not just military.

17. (S) Iran: Iran is Turkey's neighbor but also its rival. Turkish leaders across the spectrum fear the prospect of a fundamentalist Shia state armed with nuclear weapons and missiles; like other Europeans, there is a certain willful disregard of the implications and of what might be required to prevent it. In public and in private, Turkey has called on Tehran to cooperate with the IAEA, adopt full transparency on its nuclear programs, and take up the P-5 plus 1 offer of June. It will reluctantly support UNSCR sanctions -- including because they are unlikely to affect Turkish companies. Officials here share our concerns about growing Iranian political and religious influence in the region, especially in Iraq and Lebanon. They will want to hear from you about next steps and will be searching for any hint of a military option. You should ask that they stay firm in

urging Iran to comply with the international community's desire that it halt enrichment activities and open its nuclear program to full IAEA monitoring. You can also note our interest, mentioned during High-Level Defense Group discussions last month, in a fuller bilateral review of the defense and security implications of a nuclear-armed, missile-equipped Iran.

18. (S) Regional Diplomacy -- Lebanon/Israel-Palestine/ Syria: Given its shared historical, cultural and religious ties with countries in the region, Turkey believes it has a role to play in the Middle East. It strongly criticized Israel's incursion into Lebanon over the summer, but provided some 900 troops to support UNIFIL, despite considerable public opposition. Although a recent survey showed that 91.5 percent of Turks view Israel as an enemy (77 percent viewed the U.S. this way), the GOT has worked to repair its relations with Israel. PM Olmert is expected to visit Ankara in February. Gul will be interested in the Secretary's plans to accelerate work on Israel-Palestine issues. He will convey the GOT's view that continued isolation of Syria is counterproductive. You should thank Turkey for its engagement and efforts, especially its support to Lebanon's government, and urge it to continue pressing the SARG to stop interfering in Lebanon and end its support for Hizballah and Hamas.

19. (S) Energy: To reduce Russia's ability to leverage politically its market dominance in Europe, we have worked over the past year to get active Turkish support for shipping natural gas from the Caspian to Europe across Turkey. Azeri gas is available in the short-term. Shipping it to Greece and then Italy via pipelines now being built would be a "proof of concept" that could lead to other sources such as Iraq, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Turkey agrees with the concept, but has been slow to engage given its dependence on Russia for 70% of its own gas needs and skepticism about Azeri supplies. We have encouraged countries in the region to assert collectively their intent to develop Caspian gas exports. The IEA will convene a conference in February to bring together producer, consumer, and transit countries to develop such a political framework. You should express support for our southern gas corridor strategy and note that Dan Sullivan, Matt Bryza and Steve Mann will work further on

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this when they visit Ankara in February.

110. (S) Afghanistan: Turkey has twice successfully led the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, most recently from February to August 2005. This February Turkey will take command of ISAF-Central in Kabul in a rotation with France and Italy. Last November, it opened its first PRT in Wardak province. Following PM Erdogan's visit in November 2005, it increased its pledged assistance to \$100 million over five years. You should thank Turkey for its continued strong commitment to Afghanistan's reconstruction and rehabilitation and for considering a further contribution of arms, including related training. You should also encourage Turkey to increase its troop and other commitments in Afghanistan and press for an end to the caveats on the use of its forces there.

111. (S) Greece and Aegean Tensions: Reciprocal visits by military chiefs and other military exchanges between Ankara and Athens in the past few months have made progress in easing Aegean tensions while high-level political contacts have languished. Gul is now apparently refusing FM Bakoyanis' invitation to visit Athens out of spite over limp Greek support for Turkey in the EU. Turkish officials accuse Athens of rearming aircraft patrolling the Aegean and allowing fishermen to fish in the area near the disputed Imia/Kardak island. The possibility for dangerous and potentially fatal encounters remains. You should urge restraint while encouraging a high-level political dialogue. You should also urge movement on the Ecumenical Patriarch and

Halki Seminary.

¶12. (S) Armenian Genocide Resolution: Consideration in Congress in coming weeks of an Armenian genocide resolution will be immensely damaging to our relations here. It will feed already widespread anti-American sentiment. It would put at risk Turkish assistance to us on vital issues -- especially Iraq. Mil-to-mil cooperation could also be jeopardized, as occurred between Turkey and France. You should reassure Turkey that the Administration will strongly oppose such a resolution, urge that Turkey look further at normalizing relations with Yerevan, and temper its response to any congressional action in ways that will allow our cooperation on shared interests to go ahead.

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